

HAROLD PERKIN. — *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul; Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969, 465 pp.

This is a difficult book to review because one wants very much to be able to report that a volume by one of the chief organizers of the field of social history in Great Britain is a distinguished work. Since 1957, Professor Perkin has served as the editor of the Routledge and Kegan Paul series, "Studies in Social History", a project which has produced excellent volumes on topics ranging from the outlaws of medieval England, to the nature of landed society in the eighteenth century, to the impact of railways on Victorian cities. These volumes have been wisely chosen and well edited. Professor Perkin was elected to England's first professorship of social history at the University of Lancaster.

Alas, Professor Perkin's own book does not come up to the high standard of the other volumes in the series which he edits. His study is based almost entirely upon existing works and reference to new material is limited. Nor does the book provide a new synthesis of existing material. His method is essentially aggregative rather than assimilative, and in this case the whole is rather less than the sum of the parts. Moreover, two of the most crucial topics for an understanding of the era of the industrial revolution are touched only in passing: the demographic explosion and the changes in the modes of cultural transmission consequent upon the redefinition of the family unit following industrialization. There is no bibliography but the index is adequate.

Professor Perkin's basic assumption is that the industrial revolution was more than merely industrial. This is a safe enough point, having been made by Arnold Toynbee in his lectures of 1880-81 wherein the concept of the industrial revolution was first articulated. The real questions are what was the nature of pre-industrial English society, how did it change, and why?

On the first question, Perkin states that the old society was a classless hierarchy based on property and patronage. This society was essentially local. Only at the very top of the social pyramid were individuals conscious of their connections with those of their own level. This is basically the concept of the "one-class society" articulated by Peter Laslett in *The World We Have Lost* (London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1965), although to judge from Perkin's footnotes he evolved the concept independently. This concept of the one-class or classless society (synonymous in practice if not in grammar) is a stimulating one but it stimulates by overstatement. It would be one thing to state that loyalties and identification in eighteenth-century English society were stronger along the vertical than along the horizontal social axis, but it is quite another to deny that horizontal loyalties existed except among the gentry and aristocracy. To do so, one must ignore the considerable evidence of class conflict

in the eighteenth century and of the complex interrelations of artisans and craftsmen which stretched across the country and which clearly involved a sense of class loyalties.

As for the causes of the industrial revolution in England, Perkin has recapitulated the view that the unique configuration of English society was the chief determinant of the process: "From whatever angle we look at the causation of the Industrial Revolution, then, whether from the broader political, scientific or religious, or from the narrowly economic point of view, it was the nature and structure of English society which gave the various causes their opportunity, and set them to work in spontaneous harmony" (p. 97). Apparently, Perkin is unaware of, or has failed to comprehend, the monumental essay on the industrial revolution by Professor David S. Landes in the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (republished separately as *The Unbound Prometheus* by Cambridge University Press, 1969). Landes argues conclusively that, to understand England's initial industrialization, one must survey not only the supply of industrial inputs (social and physical), but one must emphasize the great pressure of economic demand which called forth the new techniques. In emphasizing the supply side, Perkin has placed himself in a ludicrous position, for we find him engaged in the intellectual equivalent of trying to push a piece of string.

Happily, when dealing with the effects of the industrial revolution, this book contains some sections of real brilliance. For example, Perkin's conception of sectarian religion as "the midwife of class" is striking:

The role of sectarian religion was threefold: to give expression to emancipation from the dependency system before it hardened into overt class antagonism; to provide the means, or at least the model, of class organization; and, not so much by passive teaching of patience as by active example of the benefits of non-violent organization, to influence class conflict in the direction of non-violence, and so to administer an analgesic against the pains of labour (p. 196.).

As argued by Professor Perkin, this analysis provides one of the most satisfying theses about religion and the working classes yet to appear. The book will, one hopes, spawn several studies aimed at testing the thesis in detail.

Another area in which the book is excellent is the chapter on "The Rise of a Viable Class Society". This represents a refreshing change from the over-emphasis upon class conflict which characterizes so much writing about English social history. The most important point about the evolution of English industrial society was not class conflict (although it certainly was a significant phenomenon), but the remarkable fact that the classes evolved means of accommodating one another. In the future our knowledge of English society would be served if some historians would direct their energies to examining

the modes of accommodation, the styles of communication, and the evolution of class tolerance, the importance of which Perkin so clearly points out.

Thus, if Professor Perkin's book as a whole is less than successful, one should dwell upon the virtues possessed by some of the chapters, and continue to be grateful for Perkin's work as an editor and as an organizer.

Donald H. AKENSON,
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BRASSEUR DE BOURBOURG. — *Histoire du Canada, de son Église et de ses missions*, tome I-II; Jean B. A. FERLAND, *Cours d'histoire du Canada*, 2 vol., S.R. Publishers Limited, Johnson Reprint Corporation, Monton & Co., N.Y., 1968 et 1969.

Ces ouvrages font partie d'une collection de deux cents études classiques sur l'histoire du Canada et des États-Unis publiées avant 1867 et choisies pour être reproduites en réimpression. Les livres sont réimprimés au format de l'édition originale et sous une reliure solide. La liste des quelque soixante titres disponibles de la collection « Canadiana avant 1867 » est donnée à la fin de chaque tome. Cette heureuse initiative permet aux nouvelles bibliothèques de s'équiper en classiques souvent introuvables et aux anciennes bibliothèques de mettre en usage des exemplaires solides qui ne sont pas pièces de collectionneurs.

L'*Histoire* de Brasseur a fait un beau tapage lors de sa parution en 1852 puis fut vite oubliée. On a fait œuvre utile en réimprimant cette rareté. Certes sa valeur historique a été fortement ébranlée par l'opuscule de Ferland (voir Robert SYLVAIN, *Un singulier historien*, dans la *Revue de l'Université Laval*, septembre et octobre 1948, t. III, p. 71-88 et 145-166). Les préjugés anglophobes, anti-protestants et anti-libéraux de l'auteur ajoutés à son hostilité à l'endroit de Québec et son admiration aveugle pour les ultramontains de Montréal lui enlèvent du crédit. Mais on trouve des pages intéressantes sur des problèmes qui restent à étudier comme l'accueil froid réservé aux Irlandais à Québec (p. 201). Le tout écrit d'une plume élégante et alerte: le tableau de Québec (p. 206) mériterait de figurer dans une anthologie. Il semble que Brasseur a peu inventé mais s'est plutôt fait l'écho de légendes et de traditions qui couraient à l'époque sur l'histoire de l'Église canadienne. Son témoignage sur les dissensions et les divisions du temps reste fort révélateur.

C'est l'histoire par moments fantaisiste de Brasseur qui déclencha la vocation historique de l'abbé Ferland. Son *Cours d'histoire du Canada* dont le premier tome est de 1861 figure dans toutes les bibliothèques et a constitué jusqu'à celle de Lanctôt, soit pendant près d'un siècle, la synthèse la plus